

# Otter Creek Survey



## *Final Report*

*Findings from a voluntary public input process  
regarding the future  
Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area  
via Web questionnaire  
posted online 24 September-15 October*

*December 2010*

*Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources*

## **Executive Summary**

The Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources conducted a voluntary and anonymous Web survey\* to obtain public input from those interested in the future of Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area in Meade County. The electronic survey was launched on 24 September and publicized through a variety of media to encourage public awareness and participation. Paper copies were provided upon request to those without Internet access. The survey closed at midnight on 15 October.

The total number of surveys completed was 4,242. The average (mean) number of household members reported was 3.15. The sum of household members across all surveys was 13,345. Nearly all survey participants (93%) resided in Kentucky, particularly in counties in the vicinity of Otter Creek.

Most participants were male (75%) and married (74%). Participants' ages were relatively evenly distributed among 5-year age categories from 15 to 64 years old. The largest single age group represented was 45-49 (14%). Most participants either had some college (27%) experience, a bachelor's degree (26%), or a Master's or Doctoral degree (17%), while 17% had either a high school diploma or GED. Almost all participants were Caucasian (96%) and resided in a suburban (38%) or rural area (33%). Most survey participants had visited the Otter Creek Park before it closed in 2009 (76%), and of those, about 96% had visited more than once. About 88% of park visitors were satisfied with their experiences there. The most popular activities at the former Otter Creek Park among survey participants were hiking (69%), wildlife viewing (56%), picnicking (48%), visiting the nature center (43%), fishing (37%), walking (32%), and primitive camping (31%).

Survey participants were also asked about their recreational activity on other areas during the last three years. A total of 64% reported having fished, while 41% had other household members who fished. Approximately 57% hunted in the last 3 years, while 21% had other household members who hunted. Over 60% watched wildlife, while 43% had other household members who participated in wildlife-watching. Approximately 41% of participants had been involved recently in target shooting, 30% in shotgun shooting, 28% in archery shooting, and 65% bought a hunting or fishing license. Approximately 50% participated in primitive camping and 23% camped with RVs. A majority (57%) had recently paid a fee to access outdoor recreation. The average (median) time participants were willing to travel for quality outdoor recreation was 90 minutes.

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*\*Because participation in this survey was open to the public and voluntary (self-selected), statistics derived from its data were not statistically representative of any particular population. Rather, the survey provided a means of obtaining broader public input than was possible through a conventional public meeting.*

About 88% of Web survey participants were interested in visiting Otter Creek after its re-opening. Among survey participants, the most popular activities desired at Otter Creek were hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, and primitive camping (each indicated as an activity of interest by 50% or more of participants). Other popular activities (interest shown by 25% or more of survey participants) included, in descending order: nature center, hunting, picnicking, photography, target shooting, kayaking or canoeing, walking, swimming, shotgun shooting, dog walking, archery, bicycling, mountain biking, and bird-watching.

The most preferred trails access option for horseback riders and mountain bikers was to partition the trails spatially so that each group uses separate, designated trails totaling about half the total trail mileage each.

The department does not receive General Fund tax dollars, but is predominantly funded by user fees, such as hunting and fishing licenses. It will be necessary to fund other non-traditional recreational opportunities at Otter Creek with user fees. Participants were asked to rate fee options for admission and special activity fees for horseback riding, mountain biking, and shooting sports. It is the department's intention for children under 12 to be exempt from a daily or annual entry fees.

Low and high fee options were offered randomly to half of the survey participants in order to gauge willingness to pay different fee amounts. For admission fees, about 70% of participants rated the low daily fee option of \$5 and low annual fee option of \$50 as "about right" or better, though around 30% perceived each as "somewhat high." By contrast, the high daily fee option of \$10 was rated "somewhat" or "very high" by over 70%, and the \$100 annual entry fee option was rated as high by about 62% of survey participants.

Special activity fee options were comparably rated to those of admission fees. The "low" activity fee options (\$5/day and \$50/year) were rated "about right" or low by over 60% of survey participants, whereas 55% felt that a \$10/day or \$100/year fee was somewhat or very high.

## **Introduction**

Upon Governor Steve Beshear's announcement that the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources would be acquiring the Otter Creek Park property from Louisville Metro Parks in order to create a new outdoor recreation area, the department welcomed public input from interested individuals and groups. KDFWR staff also interviewed representatives from various user groups who had historically used the area. To obtain broader public input from a wider audience of stakeholders, the department initiated a voluntary Web survey to solicit public input from those interested in the future of Otter Creek.

## **Methods**

The online survey\* form was developed by the department's Public Affairs Division staff using SurveyGizmo™ online survey software. The department included questions related to participants': (1) past experiences at Otter Creek Park; (2) general outdoor recreation; and (3) expectations and attitudes about recreation at the future Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area. The software also collected basic demographic information about respondents. The survey was anonymous, and participants were asked to respond only once on behalf of their entire household. Duplication of entries was controlled using electronic security measures for the online survey and control numbering for paper copies.

The online survey was opened on 24 September and closed at midnight 15 October 2010. Persons without Internet access were afforded the opportunity to request paper copies of the survey during the survey timeframe, provided they were postmarked by or delivered to KDFWR headquarters by 15 October. After completing the survey online, participants were redirected to a separate, online database and given the options of 1) participating in a cash gift card drawing and 2) signing up for future information Email updates about Otter Creek.

## **Publicity**

The survey was publicized widely, beginning with a department news release on 24 October sent to statewide and regional news media, and posting of links to the survey on the department's Internet home page. Email announcements of the survey were sent to outdoor recreation user groups and organizations, pertinent Web sites and blogs, businesses, regional media, and interested individuals. The department requested of individuals and groups receiving the announcement that they forward it to other interested parties, and to post information about the survey on relevant Web pages and blogs. The Kentucky Conservation Coalition emailed the news release to its 60,000 electronic contacts.

A variety of media and organizations provided publicity for the survey. For example, *The Courier-Journal* newspaper provided coverage about the survey in its outdoor column and later as a general interest story. WAVE-3 Television announced the survey

during its evening news early in the survey window and then revisited the topic during the week of 11 October, including an interview with department staff about the survey and the future Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area.

The department's Public Affairs Division staff delivered informational displays about the survey and thousands of survey invitation cards to 75 sporting goods/license vendors in the Otter Creek area and surrounding counties. Staff from Wildlife and Law Enforcement divisions delivered survey invitation cards to many area businesses and organization contacts, as well as other representatives upon request.

Louisville Metro Councilman Bob Henderson requested copies of the paper survey to distribute at the Southwest Festival weekend. Public Affairs Division staff delivered hundreds of survey invitation cards and paper surveys, some of which were provided to persons without Internet access.

Three user groups requested a department presence at a scheduled meeting during the survey period to discuss the survey; department staff visited two groups' meetings (the Meade County Sportsmen's Club and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Posse).

## **Results**

### ***Response***

Because participation in the survey was voluntary, a response rate could not be calculated. Partially completed or abandoned surveys were not included in data analyses.

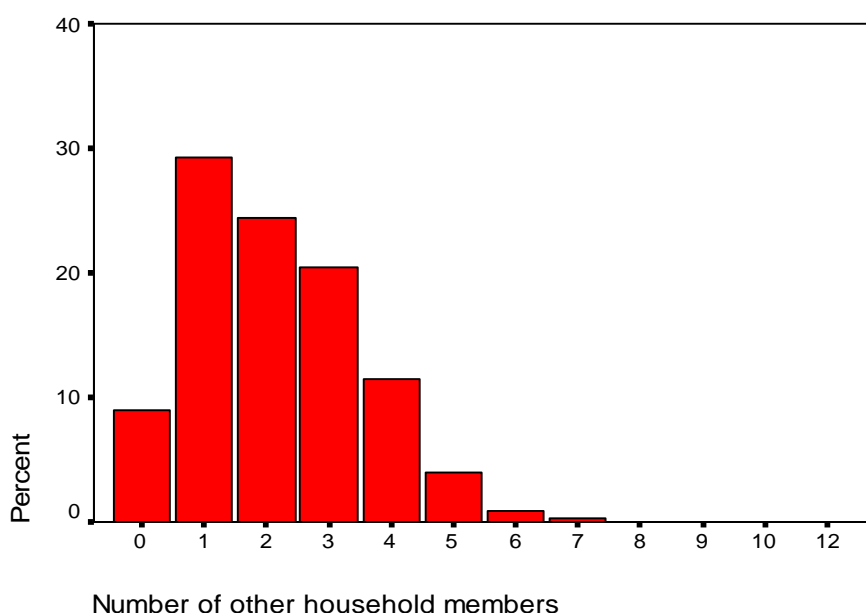
The department obtained 4242 completed surveys, 4225 of which were taken online. A total of 41 paper surveys were sent or hand-delivered to persons without Internet access, resulting in 17 completed paper copies being received and entered. Open-ended comments were submitted by 1687 of the respondents.

The vast majority of surveys (over 93%) were completed within Kentucky or neighboring states; thirteen were completed online abroad (Canada, Germany, Japan, Kenya, and Korea) but local ZIP codes were reported by those participants, probably due to military personnel, persons traveling, or others with ties to north-central Kentucky or Otter Creek in particular).

### ***Respondents' Characteristics***

The total number of household members represented in the survey by respondents was 13,345. The average (mean) household size was 3.15 persons (number of others in household averaged 2.15; see Figure 1). Among survey participants, 74.6% were male and 25.4% were female.

Figure 1. Number of "other household members" reported by survey respondents.



Approximately 93% of respondents were Kentucky residents. The most frequently reported postal ZIP codes were located in the Otter Creek vicinity or in surrounding counties. The ZIP codes represented by more than 30 participants are shown in Table 1.

ZIP Code (Town)	Number of participants
40108 (Brandenburg)	235
40175 (Vine Grove)	117
40214 (Louisville)	103
40205 (Louisville)	94
40160 (Radcliff)	91
40216 (Louisville)	84
40165 (Shepherdsville)	83
40207 (Louisville)	80
40206 (Louisville)	77
40219 (Louisville)	71
40220 (Louisville)	60
40162 (Rineyville)	49
40014 (Crestwood)	48
40047 (Mount Washington)	46
40222 (Louisville)	46
40204 (Louisville)	46
40117 (Ekron)	43
40071 (Taylorsville)	40
40118 (Fairdale)	36
40217 (Louisville)	34
40218 (Louisville)	34
40142 (Guston)	33
40031 (La Grange)	33
40059 (Prospect)	32
40004 (Bardstown)	31

Table 1. Most frequently reported ZIP Codes and number of participants from each among participants in the Otter Creek Survey.

The adult respondents were largely married (73.5%), with 12.9% single, 6.8% divorced, and 4.9% living as domestic partners.

Ages of participants were relatively evenly distributed, with about 86% reporting ages between 25 and 64. The percentages for each age category were:

10-14	0.1% (4 participants)
15-19	0.6% (26 participants)
20-24	2.9%
25-29	7.4%
30-34	10.7%
35-39	12.7%
40-44	12.7%
45-49	14.3%
50-54	13.2%
55-59	10.7%
60-64	7.9%
65-69	4.4%
70 or older	2.4%

Formal education among participants was distributed as follows:

Middle school or less	3.7%
Some high school	1.2%
High school diploma or GED	17.7%
Trade or other technical school degree	8.2%
Some college	26.6%
Associate's	12.0%
Bachelor's	26.4%
Master's or Doctorate	17.9%

The vast majority of survey participants were Caucasian (95.6%). Other race and ethnicity percentages included:

Native American/Alaska Native	1.3%
Other/Multiracial	1.3%
Hispanic	0.6%
Black/African-American	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.4%

Participants' residences were primarily in suburban (37.7%) and rural (32.9%) settings. Fewer respondents lived in Metro areas (15.7%) such as Louisville and Lexington, or other urban settings (13.2%).

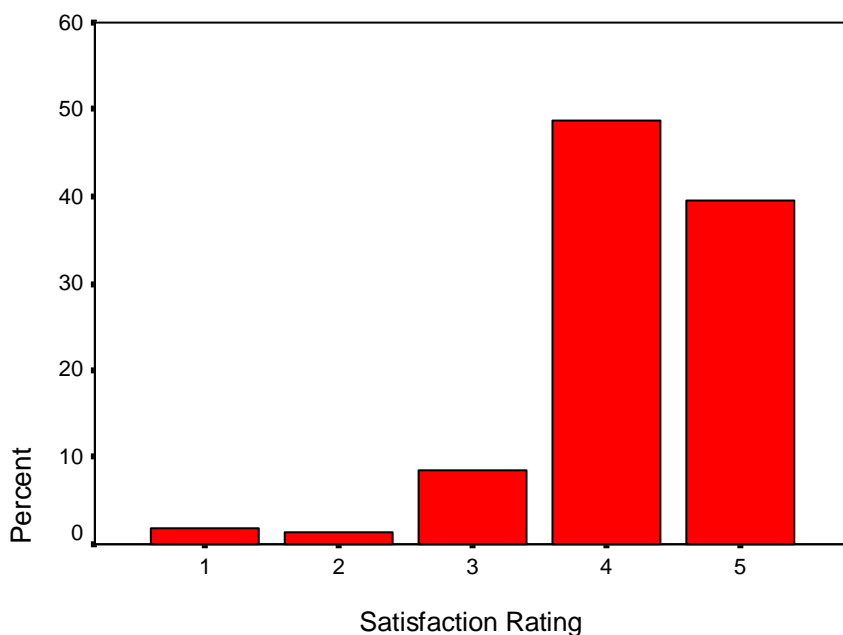
### ***Participants' Experiences at the former Otter Creek Park***

Most survey participants (75.8%) had visited Otter Creek Park prior to its closing in January 2009 (1.6% were unsure). Approximately 30% of these people visited "one to a few times per year." Just over 17% for each of these responses characterized frequency of visitation as "a few times total" or "about once per month, on average," respectively. Only 3.7% indicated that they had visited Otter Creek Park just once.



The visitors to Otter Creek in this sample were generally “satisfied” (48.8%) to “very satisfied” (39.4%), with an average (mean) satisfaction rating of 4 out of 5 possible points (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Distribution of participants' satisfaction ratings (1=very dissatisfied and 5=very satisfied) of past experiences at Otter Creek Park in the 2010 Otter Creek Survey.



Survey participants reported participation in a wide variety of outdoor activities at Otter Creek Park (Table 2). Among their top activities were wildlife viewing, hiking, fishing, camping, picnicking, and visiting the nature center.

Activity	Percent of Previous Visitors Participating	
	Respondent	Other Household Member(s)
Hiking (trail)	68.6	47.2
Wildlife viewing	55.9	38.9
Picnicking	48.1	35.8
Nature center	42.8	30.6
Fishing	36.6	20.8
Walking (road or roadside)	31.7	23.5
Camping (primitive)	31.4	21.5
Photography	31.4	18.6
Bicycling (trail or “mountain”)	24.0	19.2
Birdwatching	22.6	14.2
Walking dog	22.0	15.7
Swimming	21.4	16.5

Caving	17.9	9.1
Group event	17.3	11.7
Educational or school visit	16.8	14.0
Disc golf	15.7	10.5
Camping (RV)	14.8	12.3
Kayaking or canoeing	14.4	9.3
Bicycling (on road)	13.0	13.0
Running (trail)	10.9	5.7
Horseback riding (trail)	9.4	7.0
Rock Climbing	9.4	6.0
Rappelling	7.8	4.2
Teambuilding / Ropes course	6.3	4.1
Geocaching	5.9	3.7
Running (road or roadside)	5.5	3.7

Table 2. Outdoor activities pursued (in descending order) at the former Otter Creek Park.

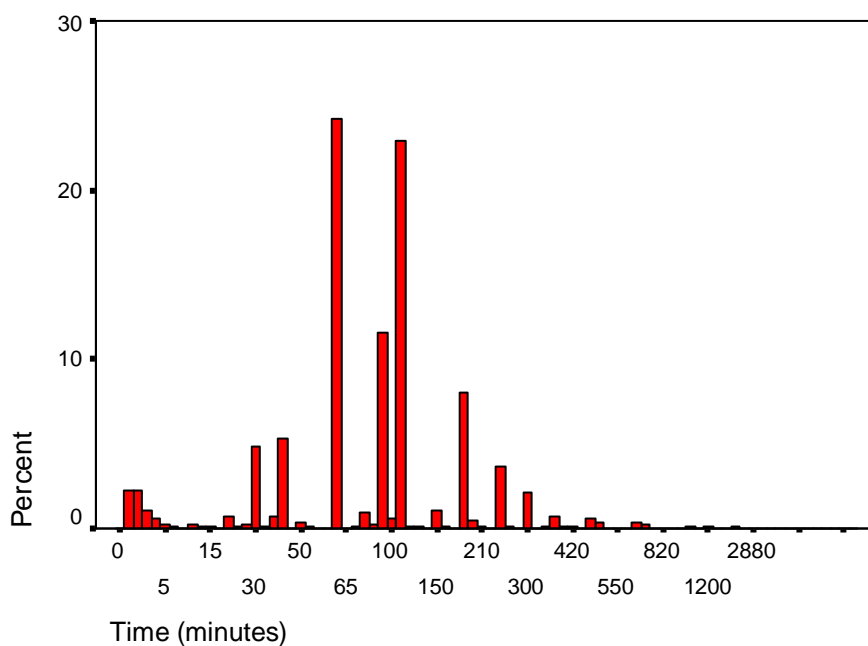
### ***Recent Outdoor Recreation Outside of Otter Creek***

Sixty-four percent (64%) indicated that they had fished within the past 3 years, while 41.8% had other household member(s) who had fished during that interval. Approximately 57% of respondents reported that they hunted during the past 3 years, while 21% had other household members who had hunted. Just over 60% of participants were wildlife-watchers, and 42.7% had other household members that had wildlife-watched. Recent bird-watchers numbered 24.9%. In terms of shooting sports, forty-one percent (40.9%) were involved in target shooting, 30.3% in shotgun shooting, and 27.7% in archery shooting. Most (64.6%) participants reported buying a hunting or fishing license during the past 3 years.

Among users of trails elsewhere during the prior 3 years, hikers made up 62% of participants, mountain bikers 24%, horseback riders 15.6%, and trail runners 14.3%. Primitive campers numbered 50%, RV campers totaled 22.7%, and equestrian campers comprised 8.4%. About 4.5 percent of respondents (and 3.8% of household members) indicated that they had not recreated outdoors much during the past 3 years. Over half (57.2%) of respondents reported having paid a fee to access outdoor recreation opportunities during the past 3 years.

The median amount of time respondents were willing to travel for quality outdoor recreation was 90 minutes. Sixty (60) minutes was the timeframe identified by the most participants (Figure 3) as the maximum they were generally willing to spend travelling for quality recreation outdoors.

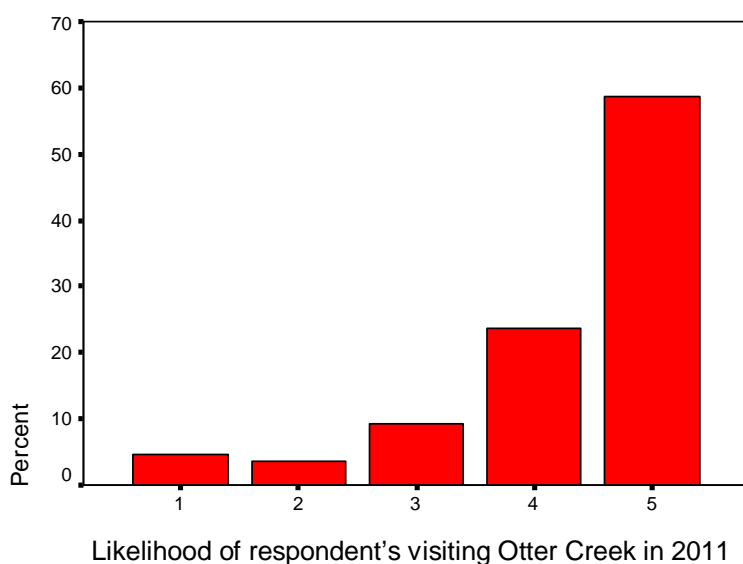
Figure 3. Distribution of time that Otter Creek Survey respondents reported being willing to travel for quality outdoor recreation.



#### ***Participants' Outdoor Recreation Interests for Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area***

Nearly 88% of participants expressed interest in visiting Otter Creek after it re-opens. Just over 11% reported needing more information before deciding about their interest in the new recreation area.

Figure 4. Participants' reported likelihood (1=very unlikely and 5=very likely) of visiting Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area after it opens, if fees are reasonably priced.



Respondents reported a variety of interests in the future Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area. The activities desired by the most respondents were hiking (64%), fishing (62%), wildlife viewing (57%), primitive camping (50%), and nature center (44%) (Table 3).

Activity	Percent of Respondents Interested in Activity at Otter Creek ORA	
	Respondent	Other Household Member(s)
Hiking (trail)	64.2	46.6
Fishing	62.0	42.3
Wildlife viewing	57.3	42.9
Camping (primitive)	49.5	35.3
Nature center	43.5	33.8
Hunting	41.7	22.9
Picnic	39.3	13.9
Photography	38.6	25.2
Shooting (target)	37.9	24.3
Kayaking or canoeing	34.7	24.1
Walking (road or roadside)	34.6	26.6
Swimming	33.2	27.2
Shotgun shooting (trap/skeet/sporting clays)	31.4	19.7
Walking dog	30.5	23.1
Archery (target or "3-D")	29.5	17.9
Bicycling (on Road)	28.6	21.3
Bicycling (trail or "mountain")	28.3	18.6
Birdwatching	27.9	19.0
Camping (RV)	24.0	19.2
Horseback riding (trail)	20.3	15.7
Disc golf	15.6	12.0
Running (trail)	14.6	8.8
Group event	14.3	10.8
Hunting (youth / first-time hunter events)	13.9	12.8
Rappelling	13.9	9.9
Educational or school visit	11.3	11.3
Rock Climbing	11.0	7.4
Geocaching	10.2	6.7
Running (road or roadside)	9.9	6.8
Camping (equestrian)	8.7	6.5
Teambuilding / Ropes course	8.3	5.9

Table 3. Outdoor activities desired (in descending order) at the future Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area.

A wide variety of other activities were suggested by participants. A total of 722 participants made suggestions through a question in the survey that allowed open-ended comments.

Participants were also queried about hunting options to obtain input on user preferences (Table 4). Youth and first-time opportunities were favored by nearly 70% of respondents. The other two options received ratings comparable to each other.

Offering youth or first-time hunter opportunities				
Strongly Oppose	Moderately Oppose	Unsure / Neutral	Moderately Support	Strongly Support
7.2%	4.2%	19.8%	18.2%	50.6%
Balancing youth/first-time hunting with opportunities for everyone else				
Strongly Oppose	Moderately Oppose	Unsure / Neutral	Moderately Support	Strongly Support
7.8%	6.1%	24.1%	21.6%	40.4%
Making hunting opportunities open to everyone equally				
Strongly Oppose	Moderately Oppose	Unsure / Neutral	Moderately Support	Strongly Support
8.2%	8.2%	27.3%	20.2%	36.0%

Table 4. Attitudes of Otter Creek Survey respondents toward hypothetical hunting opportunity.

***Preferences Among Trails Access Options***

Survey participants who expressed interest in using the trails at Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area were asked to rank three distinct trails access alternatives regarding equestrian users and mountain bikers. (The survey stipulated the assumption that trail runners and hikers would have full access to all trails year round.) In order to eliminate ordering bias, the alternatives were presented to respondents in random order. The preferences of survey participants were as follows:

1. The most preferred alternative was designation of a fixed half of the trails to be accessible to horseback riders and mountain bikers, respectively. In other words, always keep these users on separate, designated trails. The mean ranking for this alternative was 1.57 (out of 3); the median and mode ranking for this alternative were both 1.0.
2. The second most preferred option among respondents was alternating access among horseback riders and mountain bikers to different halves of the trails, with each group using different halves rotationally on a weekly, monthly, or seasonal basis. This alternative garnered an average ranking of 2.0 (for each of the mean, median, and mode).
3. The least preferred of the three options was open access to all trails year-round by mountain bikers and horseback enthusiasts. This alternative had a mean ranking of 2.33, with median and mode values of 3.0 each.

***Perceptions of Hypothetical Fee Options***

Fees will be important for the sustainability of the Otter Creek. Because the area will not be subsidized by General Fund tax dollars from local, state, or federal sources, the department must charge user fees to provide recreational opportunities that are not directly fish- and wildlife-related.

To help gauge respondents' willingness to pay for recreation at Otter Creek, two different user-fee structures were randomly presented in the survey. "High" options and "low" options were used as sideboards for both entry fees and high-impact activity fees to help obtain prospective users' opinions toward the different options.

The \$5 per day admission fee appealed to 64.8% of survey participants (rating the fee "about right" or lower; see Table 4), whereas the \$10 daily option was rated somewhat to very high by a sizeable majority (72%). The \$50 annual admission price was deemed "very low" to "about right" by a majority (58%), but the \$100 yearly admission fee was both rated by nearly 63% of participants as "somewhat high" to "very high."

“LOW” ADMISSION OPTION (\$5 daily, \$50 annual; children <12 free)					
	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About Right	Somewhat High	Very High
1-DAY	2.8%	2.6%	59.4%	28.1%	7.1%
1-YEAR	2.9%	3.8%	51.3%	31.6%	10.3%
“HIGH” ADMISSION OPTION (\$10 daily, \$100 annual; children <12 free)					
	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About Right	Somewhat High	Very High
1-DAY	2.5%	1.5%	23.7%	45.6%	26.6%
1-YEAR	3.7%	1.7%	31.9%	37.5%	25.1%

Table 5. Percent of Otter Creek Survey participants’ ratings of **admission fees**.

Perceptions of the hypothetical activity fees for higher-impact, higher maintenance types of recreation (specifically horseback riding, mountain biking, and shooting range use) generally mirrored the ratings assigned by survey respondents for the analogous admission fees (Table 6). The “low” option for daily and annual activity fees was again embraced by nearly two-thirds of respondents. However, the “high” activity fees options were not rated by a majority of respondents’ as befitting Otter Creek.

“LOW” ACTIVITY FEES OPTION (\$5 daily, \$50 annual; children <12 free)					
	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About Right	Somewhat High	Very High
1-DAY	2.8%	2.6%	58.8%	28.0%	7.1%
1-YEAR	6.0%	7.0%	47.8%	24.7%	14.5%
“HIGH” ACTIVITY FEES OPTION (\$10 daily, \$100 annual; children <12 free)					
	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About Right	Somewhat High	Very High
1-DAY	4.2%	3.9%	36.5%	32.5%	22.7%
1-YEAR	5.4%	4.8%	33.8%	32.4%	23.5%

Table 6. Percent of Otter Creek Survey participants’ ratings of additional **activity fees** for selected high-impact activities.

## Conclusion

The volume of participation and the results of this Web survey provide evidence of strong public interest in the future Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area. Because of the voluntary (non-representative) nature of this survey, the results should not be relied upon for statistical inference. However, the findings in this report do provide valuable insights into the perspectives of many historic and potential future users of the Otter Creek property. This information should be used to supplement other information-gathering means that the department will use to evaluate its options for, and to plan the future of, the Otter Creek Outdoor Recreation Area.

